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SUBJECT: TARGETED ATTACKS IN BAIDOA

#### Summary

11. (SBU) The last three months have seen the number of armed attacks targeting Transitional Federal Government (TFG) parliamentarians or their perceived allies increase in Baidoa, the seat of the TFG's parliament, and in Mogadishu. There have been high-profile attacks in the southern coastal town of Merca, and in the Hiraan region, as well. Al-Shabaab has been quick to take credit for much of the violence, but it is by no means clear whether the group, or opportunists anxious to be associated with Al-Shabaab, are actually responsible. The uptick in violence has prompted UNDP to pull its five remaining international staff from Baidoa, and an emboldened Al-Shabaab has pressured the NGOs International Medical Corps (IMC) and CARE to suspend operations in Bay and Bakool (reftel). Apparent Al-Shabaab gains have sparked resistance from the elders of clans affected by the violence and by efforts to end humanitarian aid. Their unhappiness seems to have sparked al-Shabaab, as of October 9, to make at least a rhetorical retreat. End summary.

#### Number of Attacks Increases

12. (SBU) During the week of October 6, contacts in Bay and Bakool regions confirmed that the last three weeks have seen more frequent attacks on Transitional Federal Government (TFG)-associated targets, and reported that "most" of the towns in the regions were now run by Al-Shabaab-affiliated administrators although not, they noted, by Al-Shabaab itself. The Shabaab militias in Bay and Bakool numbered between five and eight hundred, but operate in groups of twenty to forty that circulated constantly through the regions, we were told.

13. (SBU) The heavier presence of Ethiopian-trained TFG police in Baidoa, the "capital" of Bay region, as well as of Ethiopian National Defense Force meant that most of the recent reported attacks there have been remote or hit-and-run. Some MPs ascribed the recent uptick in attacks to increasingly lackluster patrolling by TFG security forces demoralized by the failure of the interim government to pay them. A partial list of some of the recent incidents in Baidoa gives a sense of their increasingly targeted nature:

-- On September 19, unknown assailants lobbed a hand grenade at a police patrol car, wounding two policemen and five civilians.

-- September 25 saw an armed attack on a Baidoa police station and mortar attacks on the homes of two parliamentarians.

-- On September 30, a roadside explosion near Baidoa's khat market killed a child and wounded two police officers.

-- On September 30, Sheikh Ali Madobe was assassinated as he left a Baidoa mosque. Sheikh Ali had close business associations with TFG Parliament Speaker Sheikh Adan "Madobe."

-- On October 5, a grenade attack on the residence of a Somali-national ICRC official killed a security guard.

-- On October 8, a nighttime mortar attack on the Speaker's residence wounded members of a neighboring family of nine.

-- On the same day, the head of the National Intelligence Agency was assassinated while at the city's central market.

14. (SBU) The fraying security has spurred UNDP to extract its five international employees. Parliamentarians, in Nairobi for a National Democratic Institute-conducted workshop, told us the week of October 6 that they, and others in Baidoa thought to be partial to the TFG, were the targets of an intimidation campaign intended to further limit its legitimacy. TFG Minister of Agriculture Mustafa Duhulow disagreed that the goal was intimidation, telling us after arriving from Baidoa October 7, "they don't want to intimidate us, they just want to kill us." One parliamentarian told us that al-Shabaab operatives conducted hit-and-run attacks from Baidoa's outskirts. The loss of innocent life and the attackers' lack of courage, he alleged, was fostering resentment toward the extremists among the

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town's residents.

15. (SBU) In advance of the October 27-29 IGAD summit on Somalia, the TFG has attempted to downplay deteriorating security. In an October 7 Nairobi press conference, TFG Foreign Minister Ali Jama described circumstances in Baidoa as "not hopeless," although he later agreed that the city was too dangerous to play host to visiting delegations.

#### Elder Unhappiness With Insecurity

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16. (SBU) Deteriorating security spurred the Digil and Mirifle Council of Elders to convene on October 6. They discussed threats to aid agencies and the problems in Baidoa. Chairman Ibrahim Muse Herow condemned attacks on aid workers, the looting of NGO offices, and the harassment of aid workers in the region. Herow accused unnamed external actors of undermining the well-being of the local communities of Bay and Bakool. Speaker of the Parliament Sheikh Adan "Madobe" separately also condemned the attacks in Baidoa at an October 5 press conference, and TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf used his Id remarks to insist that those engaged in violence have "nothing to do with Islam."

17. (SBU) One elder who has been publicly critical of strong-arm tactics against the TFG and local aid agencies, Hiraan Council of Elders Chairman Da'ar Hersi Hoshow, was assassinated on October 7. His death, the October 6 attack on a UN vehicle near Merca, and the continuing carnage in Mogadishu have created the impression that al-Shabaab, or those claiming to be affiliated with it, are in the ascendancy, but there are signs that the chaos in Mogadishu and the crackdown on humanitarian work are creating clan antipathy towards the radical organizations. In addition to statements by the Digil and Mirifle and the Hiraan Chairman, the Hawiye Tradition and Unity Council (HTUC) on October 5 blamed al-Shabaab for the closure of Mogadishu airport and created a 27-member committee to investigate security in Banadir region.

#### Resentment Causes al-Shabaab to Retreat

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18. (SBU) Elder criticism and worsening humanitarian circumstances appear to have caused al-Shabaab to take a more conciliatory tack. In an October 9 press conference, al-Shabaab spokesman Mukhtar Robow denied that his organization had threatened HTUC elders, suggested a willingness to re-open Mogadishu airport, insisted that al-Shabaab was not opposed to all aid agencies, and contended that some of the violence allegedly perpetrated by al-Shabaab was actually the work of others, whom he promised would be arrested and tried according to Sharia law.

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